Arrangements for Haj Pilgrims

†2406. DR. ABRAR AHMED: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the arrangements made for the Haj Pilgrims this year and whether it has been ensured that all the Haj Pilgrims may go on journey safely and well in time by aeroplanes;

(b) whether the arrangements of their stay in Makka and Madina have been finalised; and

(c) the steps being taken by Government to sort out the problems faced by the pilgrims during the last three years and the numer of Haj pilgrims who are allowed to perform Haj this year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (c) All necessary arrangements for the pilgrims intending to perform Haj 2003 through Haj Committee, Mumbai are underway as per the Action Plan drawn for Haj 2003.

2. Accommodation in Makkah for the Haj Committee pilgrims will be arranged as in the past in three categories. These categories are determined on the basis of distance of buildings from the outer periphery of the Haram Sharif. The process of hiring accommodation in Makkah in all the three categories has already started since June 2002. All the required number of units will be hired before the Haj 2003. In Madina, the selection of contractors for providing accommodation will be processed in October 2002 as per the Action Plan for Haj 2003.

3. During the Haj 2000, pilgrims faced hardships on account of delays while returning to India as the charter party failed to provide aircrafts on time. This problem was surmounted during Haj 2001 and 2002. The entire air transportation of pilgrims going under the aegis of the Haj Committee, Mumbai, was handled by Air India with the help of Saudi Arabian Airlines and the Indian Airlines. Similar arrangements are expected to be made for Haj 2003.

4. The total number of Indian pilgrims to perform Haj 2003 will be finalised during the discussion with the Saudi Haj Ministry in September

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

2002. However. it is expected the figure would be the same as it was during Haj 2002 viz 1,20,000 pilgrims out of which 72,000 pilgrims are expected to go through the Haj Committee Mumbai.

5. The improvements and innovations of Haj Management of Indian pilgrims is a continuous exercise. The Government regularly reviews past experience and is constantly exploring ways to further improve Haj management every year.

Portraying of South Africans of Indian Origin

2407. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in South Africa a song was written portraying South Africans of Indian origin as oppressors of black people;

(b) if so, whether Government have taken up the issue with the Government of South Africa; and

(c) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Yes Sir.

(c) The Ministry continues to carefully monitor the evolving situation, through its Mission and posts in South Africa. Most of the people of Indian origin in South Africa are South African citizens. South Africa is trying to resolve the issue in the context of its liberal and non-racial Constitution and its commitment to democracy.

Simplification of issuance of Passport

2408. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have recently decided to simplify the procedure for issuing of passports to citizens without any hassles and hindrance;

(b) if so, the details of the measures taken in this regard;

(c) whether Government have decided to open more Regional Passport Offices across the country; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?